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Legal Aid campaign fourth of the way to fund-raising goal

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Legal Aid of West Virginia announced Wednesday that it has already raised \$300,000 toward a three-year goal of \$1.2 million to help its work defending the rights of poor people.

Adrienne Worthy, executive director of Legal Aid, said her agency will receive \$400,000 less in federal funds in 2003, because the 2000 Census found 30,000 fewer poor people in West Virginia.

"We cannot meet our needs with previous federal funding levels, especially since the economy has worsened since the census was completed," she said.

Today, West Virginia has more than 315,000 poor people, or 18 percent of the state's entire population.

Nearly one of every four children lives in a household whose income falls below federal poverty levels. More than 31,000 elderly West Virginians also live in poverty.

A pamphlet being distributed by the new Campaign for Legal Aid points out, "There is only one Legal Aid lawyer for every 7,900 poor persons in West Virginia. This compares to about one attorney for every 368 persons in the general population."

The two co-chairmen of the campaign are lawyers Al Emch of Jackson Kelly and Scott Segal of the Segal Law Firm.

Emch said on Wednesday, "I have a lot of confidence in lawyers in West Virginia, who are professionally responsible and understand the importance of this project. Everyone has a stake in making our justice system accessible and fair."

Segal said raising money to help Legal Aid is critical "to help battered women, people transferring from welfare to jobs in the economy, and the elderly. It is important to guarantee everyone access to justice in the state."

Last year, Legal Aid helped more than 9,500 poor people in West Virginia. Individuals helped by Legal Aid include: a young mother and

her children being abused by a violent spouse, a severely disabled child in need of medical care, a young woman who needed more time in vocational training to escape welfare, and a woman suffering from dementia in a nursing home whose husband was trying to strip her of her financial assets.

Last year, Legal Aid spent \$387 for work on its average case. The cost to provide each hour of legal services was \$23.

Legal Aid also works closely with local community organizations, state and local Bar associations, social workers and local government agencies.

Major contributors include: Jackson Kelly; the Segal Law Firm; Bowles, Rice, McDavid, Graff & Love; Spilman, Thomas & Battle; Bordas & Bordas; DiTrapano, Barrett & DiPiero; the West Virginia State Bar; and Hill, Peterson, Carper, Bee & Deitzler.

Anyone interested in contributing to Legal Aid's fund-raising drive may contact them at 922 Quarrier St., Charleston, WV 25301. People may also call 343-3013 or (800) 642-8279.